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1907

Yale University Prize Poem

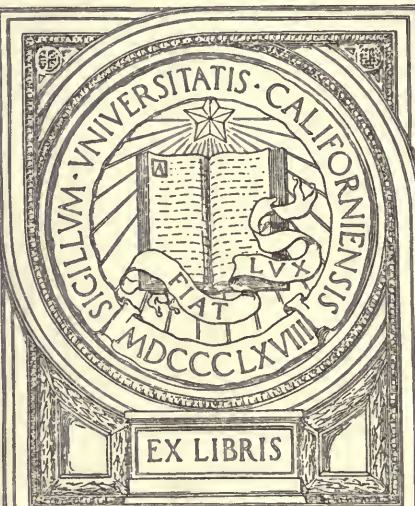
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YALE UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM

1907

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ROLAND AND AUDE

A VERSE PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

BY

CHARLES WASHBURN NICHOLS

BELCHERTOWN, MASS.
PRESS OF L. H. BLACKMER,

1907

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PREFATORY NOTE

This poem received the tenth award of the prize offered by Professor Albert Stanburrough Cook to Yale University for the best unpublished verse, the Committee of Award being Professor Edward B. Reed, Professor Charles W. Kent, and Dr. John Erskine.

APPENDIX TO THE
YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

KING CHARLES THE GREAT.

ROLAND, *his Nephew.*

OLIVER, *Roland's Friend.*

GANELON, *Roland's Steppfather.*

BISHOP TURPIN.

DUKE OF NAYMES, *the King's Councilor.*

GERARD, *a Young Hunchback Jongleur, a Favorite Minstrel of the King.*

MARSILE, *King of Spain.*

JURFALEU, *his Son.*

BLANCANDRIN, *his Messenger.*

VALDABRUN, *his Knight.*

BRAMIMONDE, *his Wife.*

BERTHA, *Roland's Mother, Sister of Charles.*

AUDE, *Oliver's Sister.*

MARIE, *her Chief Maiden.*

PEERS, BARONS, HERALDS, SOLDIERS, PAYNIM LORDS, COURT
LADIES, MAIDENS, AND NUNS.

235137

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

- ACT I. THE BETROTHAL. Garden of Chapel at Aix.
- ACT II. GANELON'S MISSION. Charles' camp at Cordova, Spain.
- ACT III. GANELON'S TREACHERY. Marsile's Court at Saragossa.
- ACT IV. SCENE I. ROLAND'S PRIDE. The Pass at Roncevaux.
- SCENE II. THE DEATH OF ROLAND. A part of the Battle-field.
- ACT V. THE DEATH OF AUDE. Aude's Chamber at Aix.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—The scenes in the second, third, and fourth acts, follow rather closely the story as it is told in the CHANSON DE ROLAND.

ROLAND AND AUDE

ACT I

The garden of the king's chapel hard by the palace at Aix. At the back, seen through the trees, is the chapel wall with a large central door, from which a flight of stone steps leads into the garden. At the right, front, are two marble benches beneath a tree, at the left a fountain. As the curtain rises GERARD is discovered on one of the benches, singing softly to the accompaniment of his vielle :

A sunbeam lights her hazel eyes,
And strays across her gold-brown hair ;
The fairy queen of Avalon
Is not so sweet as Aude the Fair.

He stops abruptly as ROLAND and OLIVER enter. Oliver is richly dressed while Roland wears a hauberk of chain mail.

ROLAND.

See what a thing it is to be a minstrel !
Canst find another man in all the court
That is not arming for the march to Spain ?
The lowest stable-hind gets him a sword
Or cast-off helm, and bears him like a man.
My lady's page puts on a warlike frown,

Struts down the hall to gain admiring glances,
And boasts of twenty paynims he will kill.
But gay Gerard can sit and tune a song !

OLIVER.

Each man must have his trade. We cannot all
Be fighters ; some must sing the deeds we do.
What were the joys of life and love and war,
Without the minstrel's song ? Is it not so,
Gerard ?

GERARD.

Thanks, gentle Oliver. Thy words
Reveal thy wisdom. Truly hast thou said
We cannot all be fighters. Neither can
We all be wise ! But do not think that I
Am quite unconscious of the war, Count Roland.
Tell me, what is a paynim like ?

ROLAND.

Why, boy,
Don't tell us that you never saw a paynim !
Methinks sweet France has cause enough to know
Their manner all too well. A paynim, lad,
Is everything a Christian knight is not :
Black-bearded creatures, with dark gleaming eyes,
Cruel in war but cowardly at heart,

Knowing no law of honor or religion.
Ah, what a thrill of joy when Durendal
Tastes blood and sings a mighty battle-song.
A worthy Christian act to rid the world
Of vermin such as they, and all brave knights
Who wade knee-deep in reeking paynim blood,
Good Turpin will absolve from every sin.

GERARD.

[*dreamily*]

I seem to see them now in shining mail,
Two mighty armies struggling hand to hand ;
The sunlight flashes on the bright blue blades,
While high above the hungry vultures wheel,
And from the craggy mountain peaks look down
Upon the feast of blood. Ah, what a sight !
Almost I would that I could go with you.

OLIVER.

'Tis not a life for thee, Gerard. Beyond
The snowy, cloud-capped Pyrenees there'll be
Long weary months of marching to and fro,
Fights in the open, or cooped up in towns
Whose streets swarm with the hostile paynim brood.

ROLAND.

We'll drive them, soon enough, before our arms,

Back to the utmost bounds of Spain, and then
Headlong into the sea.

OLIVER.

Roland, not so ;
'T will be no easy war we have to wage.
Sweet France has felt the iron gauntlet grip
Of King Marsile ere now ; no man can say
He is a coward in the fight. But oft
He wins by wiles and treacherous deceit.

ROLAND.

No fear have I of paynim King Marsile.

[GANELON *has entered unobserved, and overhears Roland's remark.*]

GANELON.

Well said, my gallant game-cock. Still, I see,
My famous stepson longs for fair renown.
So eager is he for the paynim blood
That all in armor he awaits his bride.

ROLAND [*with a start.*]

O Oliver, I quite forgot.

OLIVER.

I know ;
I was about to tell thee, but our talk
Quite put it from my mind. My brother knight,
When once thou art betrothed to Aude the Fair,
My brother thou wilt be indeed. So come,
There still is time to doff that suit of mail.

GANELON. [*with a sneer.*]

There is no need to change. The Lady Aude
Will pardon such an eager lover, who,
All clad in mail on his betrothal morn,
Is burning with desire — to meet Marsile.

ROLAND.

If thou wert not my stepsire, Durendal
Would make thee eat those words.

OLIVER.

Come, Roland, come.

GANELON.

And were I not thy stepsire, I would give
That haughty pride of thine a chance to cool,
And give the rest of us a chance to shine.

OLIVER.

[*Drawing Roland away*]

Come, brother, Aude the Fair must not wait long.

[*They go out, Ganelon chuckling to himself*]

ROLAND. [*angrily*]

Thou shalt be sorry for thy mirth ere long.

[GERARD, *left alone, resumes his practising on the vielle and hums softly to himself*]

She is the fairest flower that grows,
My lovely lady, Aude the Fair.

[*He breaks off singing but continues playing as BERTHA and AUDE enter. Aude runs up to Gerard*]

AUDE.

Gerard ! You're making a new song ! Now don't
Deny it, for I heard you. You must sing
For Lady Bertha.

GERARD.

Till the song is done
I cannot sing ; not Lady Aude herself
Could drag it from me. Thou shalt hear ere long.

AUDE.

I want to hear it now. You know, Gerard,
This is the happiest morning of my life.
You would not disappoint me?

GERARD. [*smiling*]

Wait and see.

AUDE [*to Bertha*]

Gerard will always have his way. But thou,
Dear Lady Bertha, thou wilt grant a wish
Of mine? Oh, such a little wish!

BERTHA.

I will ;
Ask anything, and if the power is mine
To give it thee, it shall be thine.

AUDE [*timidly*]

I wish
To call thee by the name —

[*She hesitates*]

BERTHA. [*encouragingly*]

Yes, child.

AUDE.

The name

Of mother.

BERTHA.

[*drawing her close*]

Why, my little girl, I long
To have thee call me mother. Know'st thou not
I never had a daughter? Thou shalt be
My only girl. I love thee, Aude.

AUDE.

I have

No mother and I long for one to-day ;
I fear the great betrothal all alone.

BERTHA.

Beside me thou shalt stand, so have no fear,
And soon my Roland shall be thine alone.

AUDE.

Ah, long will be the days when he is gone !
Tell me, dear mother, of that happy time
When Roland was a boy in Italy.

BERTHA.

That was a happy time indeed ! Long years
Have passed since those bright, far-off, golden days
When I, a headstrong maid, learned what love means,
And fled with Count Milon from sunny Aix.
My brother, great King Charles, had formed a plan
To wed me to his warrior Ganelon ;
But I had seen the brave Milon, and knew
That he, and he alone, could give me joy.
Noble he was, a fearless foe in war,
But gentle, full of love, to all his friends ;
And in his veins the blood of heroes flowed,
Those northern vikings of the stormy seas,
Who fought and loved with the same reckless might,
And nothing feared saved cowardly deceit.
Angry was Charles when we two slipped away,
In secret wedded by the good archbishop,
And safely passed the bounds of Italy.

AUDE.

I would that such a life might be for me !

BERTHA.

Dear child, thou little knowest what it means !
Thou canst not picture all the life we led ;
Pursued by wrath of Charles we journeyed far,
On foot and clothed in rags like beggars twain

Who limp from town to town to beg their food.
Sheltered in huts and caves we lived along,
And Roland came to make the burden light,
And love revealed the heights to which we climb
If we cast all aside to follow her.
What were the hardships of our humble days
If only love could last and bless us both !
It could not be, for paynims threatened Rome,
And Count Milon went riding to the war,
To find an end to all his toil and pain.
Then came my brother into Italy
When Roland was a lad. Without his aid,
What knightly training could I give my son ?
We went before the king, and he, because
The little lad found favor in his sight,
Forgave, on one condition, all my sin.

AUDE.

And that ?

BERTHA.

I should be wed to Ganelon.

AUDE.

Ah, mother !

BERTHA.

[*after a pause*]

More I need not tell ; thou know'st
How Roland has fulfilled his youthful dreams,
And keeps the vows which every good knight keeps.

AUDE.

Ah, more than that he does—outshines them all !
No arm like his to wield a Durendal,
And make his name a terror to the foe.
Victorious in Spain our cause shall be,
And nobly will he battle for the right ;
But, ah, I shall be fearful till he comes,
Crowned with bright fame, to claim me for his bride.

GERARD. [*who has been softly playing on
his vielle, now starting up and coming to the side of Aude*]

My Lady Aude, I'll go to Spain with him,
Watch by his side, and bring him safely home.

BERTHA.

Gerard ! What could'st thou do ? Thou dost not know
The life that would be thine ! We need thee here ;
We cannot let him leave us, can we, Aude ?

AUDE.

Not we ! Think of the dreary hours, Gerard,
That we poor women must pass through alone,
When all our knights are gone. Thou must stay here
And sing us cheery songs, bright roundelays,
And tales of happy lovers long ago,
To make us smile, and for a time forget
The anxious longing. Nay, thou canst not go !

GERARD.

Thou would'st not be so cruel, lady mine !
For all my life I've lived within those walls,
Since I was brought to Aix, a captive child
Too young to have remembrance of the time
Before I came. No mother have I known,
Dear lady ; oftentimes the boys would laugh
And call me names ; no refuge had I then,
No place of comfort, but the chapel yonder.
Many a time I've cried myself to sleep
Within the organ loft. These later years
Have been more happy, for the king is kind.
But I would see beyond the Pyrenees,
And hear the clash of battle, sword on shield,
And be a man, a singer of brave deeds !
Thou'lt not refuse to ask the king this boon
For me ?

[GANELON is seen approaching]

AUDE. [*smiling*]

If thou wilt bring my Roland home
Untouched by paynim spear, I'll ask the boon.

GERARD.

I'll never leave his side. No paynim spear
Shall reach him unawares ; my hero knight !

GANELON. [*aside*]

How they all love the arrogant young fool !

[*To Bertha and Aude*]

Come, come my laggard ladies, know you not
That Charles and Turpin wait. Strange bridal pair !
Here Roland donned his armor for the fray
As if for war ; would'st thou forget as well ?

AUDE.

Thou wilt be with me, mother ?

BERTHA.

Yes, my child.

[*They go out. Gerard resumes his playing on the marble
bench, and practises another stanza of his song*]

O gypsy wind, in love caress
The shining halo of her hair ;
The spirit of all loveliness
Has crowned her queen, my Aude the Fair.

GERARD.

I could not make a song that would be worthy
To sing to Lady Aude. Such as it is,
'Tis done—the best that I can do. How can
I go and leave her here? She's kind to me.
More kind I never knew nor ever shall.

[*He rises and goes toward the chapel steps. The bishop's voice is heard intoning, and he climbs the steps*]

The bishop's voice! The service will be done.
I wish that I could see them; a brave pair
They are to stand together.

[*The sound of the organ is heard within. GERARD runs down the steps and stands beside one of the trees*]

Lo, the king!

[*The great doors are suddenly thrown open, and the procession comes down the stone steps. CHARLES and TURPIN in advance, then ROLAND and AUDE, GANELON and BERTHA, OLIVER and NAYMES, the other peers and their ladies. They scatter and converse with each other*]

CHARLES.

[*To Roland and Aude.*]

Ah, happy pair ! My blessings on you both !
My nephew, thou art doubly fortunate :
Thou art a brother now to Oliver,
And thou hast won the sweetest bride in France.
And thou, fair Aude, art lady to a knight
Whose worth and courage brightens all my realm.
I hold myself most fortunate to call
The Lady Aude my niece. To-day rejoice ;
Forget the path that waits us with the dawn ;
To-day we will be happy, free from care.

GERARD.

A boon, O king !

CHARLES.

'Tis granted, gay Gerard ;
Thou hast a wedding song, no doubt, to sing.
Tune the vielle ; we'll hear it at the feast.

GERARD.

It is not that, my king. I long to go
With thee and Roland into Spain, to see
The battle's shock and sing of warlike deeds.

CHARLES.

A minstrel in the war?

[*Aude whispers to him*]

My Lady Aude,
I cannot well refuse thy first request.
Come hither, minstrel. Know'st thou not that all
My trusted men are knights? How canst thou then
Be our companion on the march, and not
Be made a knight?

[*He takes the bow of Gerard's vielle*]

This is the weapon thou
Shalt wield in Spain. Kneel down, Gerard; with this
Thy sword, I dub thee knight of minstrelsy.

[*He touches Gerard across the shoulder with the bow of the
vielle, and then puts a gold chain about his neck*]

And here receive the gift of Charles the king.
Rise, Sir Gerard, and bear thee as a knight,
And sing of war and victories in Spain.
To-morrow's dawn will find us on the road.

[*Gerard is left speechless, while the king turns to the others*]

And now, good bishop, let us to the palace;
A goodly feast is toward. Come Naymes, my duke,

And all the rest ; prepare ye for the banquet.

[*They all go out slowly, leaving Gerard in the same spot, and Roland and Aude upon the marble bench whither they had gone*]

AUDE. [*timidly*]

Oft have I heard in old romances sung
By wandering jongleurs, how noble ladies
Have belted on their lovers' swords before
They went to war. May I do this for thee,
My lord ?

ROLAND. [*smiling*]

You may, my Aude.

[*He looks around and sees Gerard*]

Come here, Gerard.
The lady Aude would have thee seek my sword.
It lies within the palace ; thither run,
And bring it here to me.

[*Gerard runs out. Roland turns to Aude*]

Dear Lady Aude,
Be not cast down because I go to Spain ;
The war will not be long. Once we have driven
The cowardly paynims back unto the sea,
And made them taste submission, we'll return

With songs of conquest to our own fair France.
No need hast thou for fear ; I shall be safe.
Think how my Durendal shall havoc make,
And bring sweet France to honor once again.

[GERARD'S voice is heard behind the trees, coming nearer and nearer, singing. They stop to listen]

Steal softly down the garden path,
Thou gentle zephyr of the May,
For there thou'lt find a fairer flower
Than ever blessed thy wand'ring way ;
A sunbeam lights her hazel eyes,
And strays across her gold-brown hair ;
The fairy queen of Avalon
Is not so sweet as Aude the Fair.

The curving of the lily's throat
Can never match my lady's face ;
There's not a deer that roams the wood
Can equal her in winsome grace.
The blushing of the reddest rose
Could never with her lips compare,
She is the fairest flower that grows,
My lovely lady, Aude the Fair.

Oh, sing, melodious nightingale,
I cannot match my song with thine ;
Thy notes alone have power to tell
The secrets I would sing in mine.
O gypsy wind, in love caress
The shining halo of her hair ;
The spirit of all loveliness
Has crowned her queen, my Aude the Fair.

[*At the last lines Gerard has entered with the sword. Roland takes it and gives it to Aude*]

AUDE.

Thank you, Gerard. I'll not forget that song.

[*She turns to belt the sword about Roland, who has thrown back his mantle and is seen still in armor. Gerard, forgotten, turns away and disappears among the trees. AUDE kisses the sword and buckles it on*]

Great Durendal ! I kiss thy mystic runes,
And pray that never in the hottest fight
Thou wilt betray thy lord—thy lord and mine !
Ah, Roland, I am envious of your sword ;
For well I know the love you bear for it,
And how you long to wield it in the fray.
Close by your side it goes, while I remain
To mourn the passing months in dreary Aix.
Go, wield it well, and win you fair renown,
But O my Roland, when the strife is o'er,
Come quickly, quickly back to Aix and me.

[*She clasps him about the neck as the curtain falls*]

ACT II

Charles' camp at Cordova, Spain, a year later. A temporary throne is discovered beneath a tree as the curtain rises, and Gerard is seen in the midst of a group of soldiers who are engaged in polishing their armor.

A SOLDIER.

Sing us a song, Gerard.

ANOTHER SOLDIER.

Up with thee, lad ;
'Twill make the work seem light.

VOICES.

Aye, aye, Gerard !

[GERARD *climbs upon the throne and sings*]

I sing the song of the soldier's life,
The song of war and the battle's strife,
The clashing of the spears ;
The thrill of the wild, exultant ride
On bounding chargers, side by side,
The war-shout in our ears.

I sing the song of the red camp-fire,
The leaping flames that never tire
In keeping back the night ;
Then tumble up and clatter away,
When the trumpet calls at the break of day,
And sends us to the fight.

We follow the road in sun or rain,
Over the mountains into Spain.
Dost hear our sabres ring ?
Here's death to the foe, and woe betide
The paynim country where we ride
To serve our lord the king.

[*As the song is over, amidst applause, a trumpet is heard, and the king enters, attended by heralds, TURPIN, and NAYMES. The soldiers go out. CHARLES takes his seat on the throne which GERARD has vacated*]

CHARLES.

Come hither, lad. How likest thou the war ?
Methinks *thy* spirits do not flag, at least.

GERARD.

Nay, sire ; I love the joy of such a life.

CHARLES.

Dost never tire and long to be in France ?

GERARD.

Sometimes I would give anything to be
Within the garden-walls at sunny Aix,
Singing songs for Aude the Fair. But then I see
The walls of Cordova come crashing down
Before our mangonels, and all the paynims
Fleeing before our arms, and hear the song
Of victory go rolling up to heaven,
And then I feel great joy that I am here.

CHARLES.

Brave lad ! Does he not teach us all a lesson,
Good Turpin ?

TURPIN.

Yea, I would that there were more
With such untiring hearts, but few there are
Who would not leave Marsile in Saragossa,
And hie them back to bask in sunny France.
Tell us, Gerard, shall we not take Marsile
In triumph back to Aix ?

GERARD.

Aye, that we must.
Ah, what a time there'll be ! I long to see
The great procession winding into Aix,
And hear the church bells ring above the roar

Of shouting, banner-waving crowds, That day
Will be reward enough for all our toil.

[*A trumpet is heard. A herald of the king enters*]

HERALD.

Ambassadors from King Marsile, O king.

CHARLES.

We will receive them here.

[*The herald goes out. There is a stir in the group about the king*]

Stay, gentle duke,
And thou, good Turpin. Stay and hear the word
They bring. Perchance they weary of the war ;
And then, Gerard, thy wish will be fulfilled.

[*BLANCANDRIN enters with other paynim lords. He advances before the throne, and bends the knee*]

BLANCANDRIN.

Great king, I bring thee greetings from Marsile.
Blancandrin am I called, and hold the power
To treat with thee concerning peace. For much
Our valiant king doth long to end the war.

Full long enough thou hast laid waste the land,
And rendered all of Spain save Saragossa
Depopulate. Return, O king, to France ;
Marsile will come himself to far-off Aix,
And be baptized, and swear his fealty.
From thee he'll hold the march of Spain ; where once
He was the king, he will become the lord.
Rich gifts I bring in token of surrender
For thee to carry back to France, where they
Shall richly shine, the wonder of all men.

CHARLES.

Thy words are well. But King Marsile is proud,
And I know not if he will be my vassal.
What pledges canst thou give that this shall be ?

BLANCANDRIN.

Thou shalt have hostages of no mean birth —
My son shall be among them. Other lords
Shall send their sons. Thou shalt be satisfied.

CHARLES.

Thou speakest well. Before my councilors
I'll put thy message. Good cheer shalt thou have
Before thou goest hence.

[*To a herald*]

Go lead these men
To worthy lodgings. Spare no pains to make
Their waiting easy.

BLANCANDRIN.

King, we give thee thanks.

[*As they go out, Charles turns to another herald*]

CHARLES.

Go, herald, summon all my knights and peers.

[*The herald goes out, and trumpet-calls are heard immediately*]

Thy counsel, Naymes, just as of old, I'll need ;
Stay thou at my right hand.

[*ROLAND enters, followed by OLIVER and other peers*]

Ah, nephew Roland,
First at the council just as first in battle ?
Come near and stand beside me.

[*GANELON enters, and overhearing this, scowls*]

Ganelon,
We trust to thy advice, so fail us not.

[*Peers, barons, and knights crowd in. An open place is left before the throne*]

Approach, my peers, and all my barons brave ;
Marsile hath sent me gifts, and promises
If we return to Aix he'll follow us
And be baptized, and swears that he will hold
This land of Spain in bonds of fealty.
What think ye of the plan ?

ROLAND.

[*Springing forward*]

It is not good !
We cannot put our trust in King Marsile.
Think ye to put your faith in treachery ?
For every paynim is deceitful, nor
Will e'er be changed and willingly baptized.
We have won all the land save Saragossa —
Shall we not win that too ? Then let us on,
Nor trust in King Marsile, but lay the siege
Before his very walls, and not give o'er
Till Saragossa's towers fall to the ground !

[*A silence. Charles pulls at his beard, and does not answer.
Ganelon comes slowly forward*]

GANELON.

Mere words of braggery ! It is not meet
That wise men hearken to a reckless fool.

Nay, Roland, did I mention thee? I say,
O king, that he who longs to climb the towers
Of mighty Saragossa is too proud.
The words of King Marsile are surely true.
Wherefore should we court death in needless ways?

CHARLES.

What dost thou counsel, Naymes?

NAYMES.

The wisest words
Are those of Ganelon. We have subdued
The paynim king, and wasted all his land;
We needs must hearken to his message now.
For know, O peers, and you, Count Roland, that
He offers hostages, the sons of lords
Whom he holds dearest. Let us end the war.

A PEER.

Aye, let us end the war.

VOICES.

His words are wise.

CHARLES.

You counsel well. 'Tis best to end the war.

Now must I send some warrior to Marsile,
To make the terms and take his hostages.

ROLAND. [*impetuously*]

Sire, let me go !

OLIVER. [*restraining him*]

Nay, Roland, thou shalt not.
Thou would'st provoke the king, and lose thy life.
I will be messenger for thee, my sire.

CHARLES.

Nay, neither of you shall go, nor any peer.

NAYMES.

If thou wilt give me leave, O sire, to go,
I'll carry thy commands to King Marsile.

CHARLES.

Not thou, duke Naymes. I need thy counsel here.

TURPIN.

Give me the task, King Charles.

CHARLES.

Nay, that were ill

To send thee, Turpin, to the paynim court.
Some baron must ye choose.

ROLAND.

I pray, O king,
That thou send Ganelon.

VOICES.

Aye, Ganelon !

CHARLES.

The choice is good. Come hither, Ganelon.

GANELON. [*with wrath*]

Roland, I never shall forget this day !
Thou thoughtest to be rid of thy stepsire ;
And since the king commands I needs must go.
But everlasting hatred here I swear
To thee and all who hold thee dear.

CHARLES.

Thy wrath,
Count Ganelon, availeth naught, for thou
Must surely go.

GANELON.

Yea, that I know full well.

I needs must go, nor ever shall return.
Guard well my son, thy nephew ; all my lands
I leave to him, when he becomes a man.
Never again shall I behold him here.

CHARLES.

Be not so fearful, count. Here is my glove ;
Take it, and bear our words to King Marsile.

GANELON.

[*Taking it, and turning to Roland*]

Obeys I must ; but should I come again,
Thou fool, I shall revenge myself on thee.

ROLAND.

I fear no idle threats. If thou'rt afraid
To bear the message, give it unto me.

GANELON.

Nay, go I shall ; beware what I shall do.

[*Roland laughs and shrugs his shoulders*]

GANELON.

[*In a rage against Roland*]

Thou mock'st me, dost thou ? Fool, thou little know'st

What woe is yet in store for thee ! Thou shalt
Repent thee bitterly of thy misdeed.
Thou mock'st me ? God ! That it should come to this !
For all that thou hast done to me this day
I swear thou shalt repay a thousand fold.
Thy blood shall be the price of this day's sin.
Curses upon thy head ! Nay, stay me not ;
I hate you all ! Revenge ! I'll have revenge !

Curtain.

ACT III

A large room in Marsile's court at Saragossa. Two thrones beneath a canopy. At the back, windows on a balcony overlooking the street. As the curtain rises, MARSILE and BRAMIMONDE are discovered upon the thrones, surrounded by their court, including JURFALEU, their son, VALDABRUN, and other paynim lords.

MARSILE.

Blancandrin should be here ere now. I wait,
In anxious hope, the outcome of our plot.

VALDABRUN.

A cunning plan it was, sire, all agree.

MARSILE.

It was not badly done, but much I doubt
That Charles of France will do as I suggest.
Perchance he trusteth not our promises.

JURFALEU.

And well he may not ! Should we yield our faith,
And go to France and be baptized ? Not we.
Too much we love our Spain and hate the Christians.

MARSILE.

Aye, prince, this sunny Spain of ours must not

Be subject unto Christian France. But we
Are in sore straits ; our very life depends
Upon the answer of King Charles.

[*A horn is heard without*]

'Tis come !

Quick, Valdabrun, see who are there without.

[*Valdabrun goes to the windows in the back, and looks out*]

VALDABRUN.

Blancandrin and a bearded Christian knight
Are just alighting at the gate.

MARSILE.

Mahound,

Grant us the answer we desire !

[*A herald enters*]

HERALD.

O king,

Blancandrin has returned.

MARSILE.

Bid him attend

Us here at once. Be quick !

[*The herald hurries out*]

Now shall we know
Whether we live or die. Come hither, son ;
Stay quietly at my right hand, nor make
One sign to bring suspicion on our cause.

[*BLANCANDRIN and GANELON enter*]

BLANCANDRIN.

Thy will, O sire, has been fulfilled. King Charles
Received thy message, but he did not deign
To give his answer. Ganelon he sends,
A noble baron, who will make reply.

MARSILE.

Thou hast done well. And now, baron of France,
We wait to hear thy word.

GANELON.

Greeting, O king,
From Charles, my sovran, in the name of God.
This is the answer that I bring to thee :
If thou wilt go to Aix and be baptized,
One half of Spain is thine to hold in fief.
The other half will be the fief of Roland—
No prouder man than he in all the world.
I give thee joy in such a mighty neighbor !
If thou refuse, he will lay waste thy towers,
And take thee bound to Aix to die in shame.

[*Marsile rises in wrath, and is about to hurl his javelin at Ganelon, who draws his sword*]

MARSILE.

How didst thou dare to say this unto me !

BRAMIMONDE.

[*Rising and putting her hand upon Marsile's arm*]

My lord, act not so rashly. Let him speak.
He is a noble Frank. Thou shouldst give ear
Unto his words if thou wouldst keep thy life.

GANELON.

[*Holding up his sword*]

My bonny blade, right dearly shall they win
My death, while thou art strong and true to me.
'Thou canst not keep me from my speech, O king.

BRAMIMONDE.

My lord, let me prevail. Be thou not wroth.

MARSILE.

[*seating himself*]

Forgive me, Ganelon, I was too quick.
Thy message caused me grief, for much I hoped
To keep the whole of Spain. Right well I know

That anger will not profit me in this.
Tell me of Charles. Hath he not now great age?
Long years he has waged war in many lands,
And many kings swept down from off their thrones.
Is he not old? Will he not ever cease?

GANELOON.

King Charles is not so old, and if he were,
The greatness of his spirit would suffice
To keep him foremost among valiant men.
No minstrel am I, nor have I the words
With which to give him honor worth his fame.
Wisdom and bounty both are his, and power;
But while his nephew Roland wins his praise
Ceaseless will be the conquests, for I know
No man more fearless, nor so proud of heart.
He and his peers are mighty, and King Charles
Puts all his trust in them.

MARSILE.

Perchance I may,
By going into battle with my lords,
Bring Roland to his death. My knights are brave,
Nor fear they any foe. With Roland dead
I could hold Spain, and hold it all alone.

GANELON.

Be not so foolish ; thou would'st surely fail.
But send thy hostages to France with me,
And then —

[*He pauses*]

MARSILE.

Thou hast no liking for this count ?

GANELON.

I hate him as I love my only son.
If he were gone, my son would have more favor,
And I should not be made a thing of scorn.

MARSILE.

Of wealth undreamed of I have countless store ;
Much would I give to him who showed me how
To rid the world of this proud man of war.

GANELON.

The task would not be hard.

MARSILE.

Wilt undertake

To give me this advice ?

GANELOU.

[*After a pause*]

Yea, that I will.
I care not what may happen, only this
I know, I'll win the vengeance promised him.

MARSILE.

How may I bring this upstart to his death?

GANELOU.

An easy task ! The rearguard shall be his ;
And when the army marches into France,
The guard will stay behind to keep the pass —
And then thou surely knowest what to do !

MARSILE.

And wilt thou swear that this shall happen thus?

GANELOU.

Upon my sword and all its sacred relics,
I swear that this shall happen as I said.

MARSILE.

[*To his attendants*]

Bring me the sacred book.

[*They bring it to him*]

Upon this book,
The holy laws of great Mahound the prophet,
I swear that I will strive with this proud knight
Beneath the mountain walls until he dies.

[*Jurfaleu whispers to Marsile, who nods his head, and approaches Ganelon with a splendid sword*]

JURFALEU.

Sir Ganelon, I bring thee proof to show
The prince is no less grateful than the king.
This sword is thine, my own bright studded sword,
If thou wilt put Count Roland in our power.

GANELON.

With such a gift as this, I could not choose
But act as you desire.

[*Valdabrun approaches with a helmet*]

VALDABRUN.

Sir Ganelon,
Wilt thou accept this helm, the best in Spain?
'Tis small return for all that thou hast done,
But I must give thee what I have, to show
The joy thou makest me to feel this day.

GANELON.

[*receiving it*]

I shall be proud to wear it in the fight.

[*Bramimonde comes slowly down towards Ganelon*]

BRAMIMONDE.

Sir Ganelon, right nobly hast thou done ;
My lord, the king, will give thee thy reward ;
But I would add a present of mine own
To show my gratitude. Two bracelets here
I have, and well believe there are none such
In France. Rich heirlooms were they of proud queens ;
See how the jewels gleam against the gold !
Take them, and give them to thy wife for me.

GANELON.

[*with feeling*]

Lady, I know not how to answer thee ;
My heart is running over with thy favor.
Next to my son I hold my wife more dear
Than all the world. 'T will give me deepest joy
To see her decked in bracelets such as these,
And for her sake I thank thee. Thou hast bound
Me to my promise with such chains of love
That I could not refuse to do thy will.

BRAMIMONDE.

Thou wilt not fail us. We believe in thee,
And through thee may our country find sweet peace.
Come nearer, lords and barons of fair Spain,
And swear oath to me. I am a woman,
But for my country's cause I do not fear
To look upon the glint of naked steel.
Out with your blades, and flash them up to heaven,
And swear ye will be true at Roncevaux,
And use those swords like men till they are red
With Frankish blood. Be not afraid to die
Defending Spain ! Swear this for me !

KNIGHTS.

[*With uplifted swords*]

We swear !

Curtain.

ACT IV

SCENE ONE

The Pass at Roncevaux. Mountains towering in the background. Rocks on all sides. ROLAND, TURPIN, GERARD, and peers, barons, and knights assembled at the rise of the curtain.

ROLAND.

How cam'st thou here, Gerard ?

GERARD.

I could not go
And leave thee here, my lord, and so I hid -
While thou wert bidding farewell to the king.
My place is in the rearguard by thy side.

ROLAND.

Thou art brave-hearted, lad. Soon we shall be
In sunny France.

OLIVER.

[*Entering quickly*]

O Roland, we're undone !

ROLAND.

Undone ? What meanest thou ?

OLIVER.

The paynims come !

From yonder rocky knoll I saw a light
Coming from Spain, the shining of the sun
On polished hauberks and bright gleaming helms,
On countless shields and lances tipped with fire.
O Roland, all too well I recollect
What man it was who placed us in the rear.
Thou knowest why he spoke those words of wrath
When he was sent to Saragossa. Traitor !

ROLAND.

Silence ! Thou knowest also who he is —
My mother's husband ! I say what I choose
Concerning him ; no right hast thou to speak.

OLIVER.

Forgive me, but my anger knows no bounds.
Behold us here, a little band, while there
A hundred thousand come to beat us down.
Roland, I pray thee sound thy ivory horn,
That Charles may hear it and return with aid.

ROLAND.

Nay, here's a chance to win bright fame. Wherefore
Let slip a glorious victory? Alone
We'll beat the paynims back; aye, by my sword,
Which shall run red with blood, they needs must die.

OLIVER.

Nay, Roland, be persuaded, and be wise;
We are a little band beside that host.
If Charles should only hear the horn, and come
To stand beside us, then we'd beat them back,
And keep our men to fight for Charles again.

ROLAND.

I will not blow! Shall I become a shame
Throughout all France because I summoned aid
To fight the coward paynims? Durendal
Shall scatter death throughout the heathen host.

OLIVER.

No shame would come to us. Be not so stubborn.

ROLAND.

I tell thee I will fight this out alone.
Better it is to die than be ashamed.
Why, man, the king will love us for the blows

We deal this day. If he were here with us,
We should not have such fame.

OLIVER.

We all must die.
There is no other way if thou refuse.

ROLAND.

I never heard thee speak such coward words !

OLIVER.

Roland !

TURPIN.

Sir Oliver, and thou Sir Roland,
This is no time for angry words. Thou art
In the wrong, Count Roland. Better would it be
If thou shouldst deign to sound thy ivory horn.

ROLAND.

Nay, Turpin, ask me not. My mind is fixed.
Up, comrades, there's a goodly battle toward.
Gird on your armor ; strive with mighty blows
As loyal liegemen of our lord, King Charles.
We shall send paynim souls to hell this day.

[*They prepare to fight. Turpin advances*]

TURPIN.

Barons of France, since we must fight to-day,
Be brave of heart, for on our strength depends
The glory of the king. No better way
Is there to win a place in Paradise
Than dying for your king and for your God.
Kneel down and ask forgiveness for your sins.

[*They all kneel, and he raises the crossed hilt of his sword*]

Brave Franks, I here absolve ye ; strive like men
Against the paynim swords, and if your own
Can quench their thirst in paynim blood, 't is well.
Right nobly strive, and with your sins assoiled
Ye shall find entrance at the gate of heaven.
The cause of Christ is ours ; we cannot fail.
Rise, Christian knights, armed with the might of God,
And let us raise the battle-song of Charles.

[*They rise and sing*]

The paynim host is marching nigh,
Up with the war-shout to the sky ;
On, on, for France and dare to die,
Monjoie ! For God and Charles !

We fight for France, we cannot yield ;
Up with the swords we joy to wield ;
They soon shall clash on paynim shield.
Monjoie ! For God and Charles !

Forward, nor fear to meet the foe,
Right onward let the standards go ;
Our God shall strike the paynim low.

Monjoie ! For God and Charles !

Together we will face the fight ;
We cannot fail, our cause is right ;
We stand acquitted in God's sight.

Monjoie ! For God and Charles !

Curtain.

SCENE TWO.

Above the battle-field, by a huge rock, beneath a pine. The noise of battle is dying away as the curtain rises, and behind the scene are heard three blasts on ROLAND'S magic horn. He staggers in, wounded to death. OLIVER enters, likewise wounded, and meeting him, strikes blindly at him with his sword.

OLIVER.

Down, paynim dog. Die first ; I'll follow thee.

ROLAND.

Why Oliver, dost know me not ; 't is Roland,
Thy trusted comrade. Wouldst thou strike thy friend ?

OLIVER.

I hear thy voice, but thee I cannot see.
Forgive me, Roland.

ROLAND.

Aye, thou didst no harm ;
Thou hast my pardon freely.

[*They embrace each other*]

OLIVER.

Ah, my friend,
The end has come. Did I not hear thy horn ?

ROLAND.

Yea, naught was left to do. Charles will return,
And well avenge our deaths.

OLIVER.

Thou wouldst not blow
When I besought thee ; little use it were
To blow it now, for all our men are dead.
We only live, and soon I shall be gone.

ROLAND.

Nay, Oliver !

OLIVER.

Yea, stretch me on the grass.

[*Roland stretches him out, and looks around for something
to bring water in*]

OLIVER.

No use, lad. Trouble not, the end has come.
Thy pride has brought us low, and Charles our liege

Will win no further conquests by our aid.
Never again shall we behold sweet France,
Where Aude, my sister, will be left alone,
With none to comfort her. Nay, lad, be still,
I do not chide thee. Thou hast been to me
A truer friend than ever mortal had.
The night is dark. Where are we, boy? Hands off!

[*His mind wanders*]

I am a peer of Charlemagne; come on,
There's light enough to fight. I'd have thee learn
To speak reproach of Roland, and still live.
Come on, I see thy shadow lurking there.
Strike, coward!

[*Roland tries to hold him down*]

Blow on blow I'll answer thee.
Take back thy taunting words, I bring thee death.

[*He falls back exhausted*]

'Tis done. I cannot see. Where am I, lad?

ROLAND.

Here, Oliver; dost know me not? I am
Close by thy side.

OLIVER.

Yea, I remember now.

Thy hand, friend. Clasp me close. Farewell, my brother.
Come quickly after.

ROLAND.

Stay, dear Oliver.

Oh, art thou dead, dear friend, and I yet live?
Long years we two have stood together, true
Each to the other. Now thou liest dead,
Who wast the noblest knight of Charlemagne,
And I am left alone. 'T will not be long.
On, on, dear Oliver, I follow thee.

[*Roland swoons. GERARD enters and sinks on his knees
beside him*]

GERARD.

Sir Roland ! Dear Sir Roland, answer me.
Awake ; it is Gerard who speaks to thee.
No one is left alive ; I am afraid.
Good count, awake and speak to me. I fear
To die here all alone. There was a man,
A paynim, struck me here.

[*He takes hold of his neck and shoulder*]

I cannot breathe,
It hurts me so. O Roland, art thou gone?
Hast left me all alone in this wild place?
Speak, lord ; I am afraid of my own voice.

If thou art dead, I have not kept my word,
The word I swore to Lady Aude the Fair.
Ah, lady, thou wilt wait to greet thy lord,
And he will never come. Sweet, sunny France
Lies far away, but I can see thee, lady —
I see thee in the garden with the flowers.
I would that I could sing for thee once more.

[*He tries to sing*]

A sunbeam lights her hazel eyes,
And strays across her gold-brown hair.

[*The effort chokes him, and he siezes his throat*]

Oh, the sharp pain has come again. Good sir,
Awake and hear. I cannot die alone.

[*He falls and dies. Roland arouses, and sees him*]

ROLAND.

Thou too, Gerard ! This was no place for thee.
I would thou hadst remained in sunny France,
For thou wert all too tender for the war.
Brave-hearted lad ! I mourn to see thee dead.

[*He takes up his sword, and struggles to his feet*]

The time has come when I must part with thee,
My Durendal. I cannot leave thee here
For paynim hand to wield, and yet I must.
Nay, I would rather see thee broken quite,

Than have a coward hold thee in his hand.
It breaks my heart to break thee, Durendal,
And yet I must.

[*He tries to break it on the rock, but it only bends and
springs back unharmed*]

Alas, thou art too good !
Never again amidst the battle's roar
Shall thou and I together smite the foe !
How bright thou shinest ! Ah, my eyes grow dim,
And soon I shall not see thee, Durendal !
Well I remember when I first won thee,
And how the king gave thee into my hands
One bright and happy morning long ago,
And made me knight. Ah, what a life we've lived,
My sword and I ; how many battle-fields
Ran red with blood ; how many lands we've won
From Italy to England—all the plains
Of Flanders, Brittany, and Aquitaine,
Romagna, Lombardy, Maine, and Poitou !
With thee I won the hills of gay Provence,
And conquered all the realm of Saxony ;
And now amidst the crags of Roncevaux
We part at last.

[*Far on the wind is borne the sound of the horns of Charlemagne.
Roland draws himself erect and listens*]

The horns of Charles, my king.
Here shall he find me with my face toward Spain.

[*He places himself at the foot of the pine*]

For once I swore before him that if e'er
I had to die afar, amidst strange peoples,
My face should turn, unconquered, toward the foe.

[*He places his sword and horn beside him*]

Lie there, my horn ; lie there, my Durendal.
And thou, dear, sunny land of France, farewell.
O God, the time has come for me to die.
Forgive me all the wrongs which I have done
Through all my life, and save my soul from hell.

[*With his right hand he holds up his glove to God as a sign
of surrender*]

Receive me, unafraid, to Paradise.

[*His arm falls, and his head sinks upon his breast. The
horns of Charlemagne are heard again, still far away, as the
curtain falls*]

ACT V

Aude's chamber at Aix, a few months later. Her maidens are spinning and weaving as the curtain rises. A chair, slightly raised above the rest, is vacant. MARIE enters running.

MARIE.

Oh, woe to us ! Unhappy maids are we !
Too true was the report. The king has come,
And all his knights were killed at Roncevaux.

[*The maidens all start up and cry out*]

A MAIDEN.

Ah, who will tell our lady ?

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

She will die
If she is told the truth. How she has pined
These weary months of waiting, thinking only
Of this day when the army should return !
And now, what shall we do ?

MARIE.

The king himself

Is coming here to break the news to her.
We must not show her that the tale is sad,
Until the king has come.

A MAIDEN.

Tell us the news.
How was it that the slaughter was so great,
And yet we were victorious in Spain ?

MARIE.

'T was Ganelon betrayed his stepson, for
He had him left behind at Roncevaux,
And told the paynims they would find him there.
Full bitterly he'll pay the penalty !
They say he must be torn to death. The king
Heard Roland's horn and hasted back again
Too late to save his nephew and the peers,
But well revenged himself upon the paynims,
And carries captive those he did not kill,
With Bramimonde, the wife of King Marsile.
Grievously mourns the king for those he loved.

A MAIDEN.

Hush, is not that our lady coming near ?

[*All are silent and working. Suddenly through the window at the back comes the sound of the nuns chanting in the chapel hard by for the souls of the dead. AUDR enters quietly at the back, and stands by the window listening intently*]

Father in heaven we pray thee,
Grant to these souls thy pardon,
And to Thyself receive them,
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All those who died in battle,
Martyrs for Christ and country,
Take them, we pray, to heaven,
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[*Aude shudders and crosses herself. She walks slowly down
among the maidens, commending their work*]

AUDE.

That is well done. Not so much haste, my dear ;
The skein is tangled.

[*She helps to straighten it out*]

There, 't is all right now.

[*She seats herself on the raised chair*]

Marie, the king has come ; I heard but now
The noise of his return, and yet my lord
Still lingers. Oh, I am afraid.

[*She breaks down*]

The nuns
Are chanting for the dead.

[*Clutching her heart*]

I cannot breathe.

Last night I had a dream — I tremble yet,
It was so terrible ! I had a falcon
Upon my wrist, and let it fly toward heaven ;
An eagle swooped and beat it back to earth ;
There at my feet it fluttered and was torn
To pieces, and I could not lift a hand.
Oh, what can it portend ?

[*Sobbing*]

Marie, Marie,
I cannot wait to hear !

[*She starts up. Marie takes her and comforts her*]

MARIE.

Dear Lady Aude,
Be calm ! Think not about the dream. There, there !
'T will be all right. The waiting is soon o'er.

AUDE. [*calming herself*]

Why dost thou look so strange ? Knowest thou aught ?
Answer me ; knowest thou aught of Roland, girl ?
And you, my maidens, why are you so sad,
And with averted heads bend to your work ?
Marie ! 'T is Lady Aude commands ! Give answer !

MARIE.

I saw the king, my lady, but his knights

Are not yet here.

AUDE.

Knowest thou aught of them?

MARIE.

I do not know, that is, I —

AUDE.

Answer me!

Marie, Marie, thou knowest something ill!
I must know all; it is my right to know.

MARIE.

Oh, spare me, lady!

AUDE.

Oh, what shall I do!

[*The door at the right opens quickly, and the king enters
alone, looking old and careworn*]

AUDE.

[*Flying towards him*]

Oh, where is Roland, Sire? Why comes he not?
Tell me!

[*She sways and he catches her*]

CHARLES.

[*Slowly and sadly*]

Thou askest me of one whose soul
Has fled to Paradise. Bravely he fell ;
We cannot wish for him more sweet reward.
Dear girl, take heart ; I'll give thee my own son.

AUDE.

[*Faltering, and as one dazed*]

I do not understand. With Roland dead,
I care no more to live.

[*She catches at her heart*]

Oh, I must go !
Oh, take me, Holy Mother, to thyself !

[*She dies in his arms, and her head sinks upon his shoulder.
He places her gently upon the floor and kneels beside her, chaf-
ing her hands*]

CHARLES.

Dear child, dear child, take courage. It is hard,
But we must bear it. She has swooned. Bring water.

[*After a pause*]

Alas, it is no use. Our Aude is dead.

[*Rising sadly*]

God's ways are kind. Unto himself he takes
The broken-hearted. I am left alone
To keep the realm, with all my brave peers dead ;
I would that I, too, might be taken hence
And be at rest, but I must wait my time.

[*To the maidens*]

Lift her, and bear her gently to the chapel ;
Beside her we will keep the watch this night.

[*The sound of the nuns' chanting comes in through the
window as the curtain falls*]

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